AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Claims 1-26 (Canceled).

27.   (New) A method of managing availability of workers in a team in support of the allocation of workers in said team to carry out tasks which together fulfill one or more work requirements, each worker in the team being provided with a worker interface, and said team including at least first and second workers, the method comprising:

storing team availability constraint definition data defining constraints relating to aggregate availability of said workers in said team for allocation to tasks;

storing current aggregate availability data representative of the aggregate availability of said workers in said team;

receiving at a data processor, from a first worker interface, a first worker future availability change proposal including dates / times at which said first worker is or is not available for allocation to tasks;

operating said data processor to:

i)   generate proposed aggregate availability data representative of the proposed aggregate availability of said workers in said team, based on said current aggregate availability data together with said first worker future availability change proposal;

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ii)   determine whether said proposed aggregate availability data is compatible with said team availability constraint definition data;

iii)   in the case that said proposed aggregate availability data is compatible with said team availability constraint definition data, refresh said current availability data with said proposed availability data; and

in the case that said proposed aggregate availability data is not compatible with said team availability constraint definition data, transmit a rejection signal to at least said second worker interface, whereby said second worker interface may respond to receipt of said rejection signal by outputting a second worker future availability change proposal including dates / times at which said second worker is or is not available for allocation to tasks which compensates for the first worker future availability change proposal.

28.   (New) A method according to claim 27, wherein, in the case that said proposed aggregate availability data is not compatible with said team availability constraint definition data, the step of generating and transmitting a rejection signal to at least a second worker interface comprises generating and transmitting a rejection signal to a plurality of said worker interfaces.

29.   (New) A method according to claim 27 wherein said second worker interface is provided with at least one worker profile, the worker profile comprising data in respect of a worker, the method further comprising the steps of:

responsive to receiving at a worker interface a rejection signal, reviewing a worker profile provided with respect to that worker interface; and

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outputting said second worker future availability change proposal dependent on the outcome of the review.

30.   (New) A method according to Claim 29 wherein said worker profile comprises at least first and second data types in respect of a worker, the first data type comprising at least one worker attribute and the second data type comprising availability commitments of the worker.

31.   (New) A method according to claim 29 wherein the worker profile further comprises a priority indicator for at least one availability commitment of the worker, and wherein said step of reviewing a worker profile comprises reviewing the priority indicator.

32.   (New) A method according to Claim 29 wherein said rejection signal comprises an identifier for a selected worker, or for a selected set of workers, and wherein reviewing a worker profile and outputting a future availability change proposal to the data processor dependent on the outcome of the review comprise reviewing the worker profile for the presence of said identifier and outputting a future availability change proposal only if said identifier is present.

33.   (New) A method according to claim 27 which further comprises, subsequent to generating and transmitting said rejection signal, triggering termination of

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tasks being carried out in respect of a common work requirement to which the rejection signal is related.

34. (New) A method according to Claim 33 wherein triggering termination is carried out after a predetermined time has elapsed during which no future availability change proposal has been received from a worker interface.

35. (New) Apparatus for use in managing availability of workers in a team of workers in support of the allocation of workers in said team to carry out tasks which together fulfil one or more work requirements, the apparatus comprising:

an input for receiving communication signals from a plurality of worker interfaces;

a team availability constraint definition data store for storing team availability constraint definition data defining constraints relating to aggregate availability of said workers in said team for allocation to tasks;

a worker availability data store for storing current aggregate availability data representative of the aggregate availability of said workers in said team and proposed aggregate availability data representative of the proposed aggregate availability of said workers in said team; and

a data processor,

said data processor being arranged, in use, to:

i) maintain said current aggregate availability data in the worker availability data store;

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ii)   to receive an input from a first worker interface comprising a future

availability change proposal for said first worker, said first worker future

availability change proposal including dates / times at which said first worker is

available for allocation to tasks;

iii)   to generate said proposed aggregate availability data;

iv)   to review the proposed aggregate availability data against the team

availability constraint definition data; and

v)   in the case that said proposed aggregate availability data is

compatible with said team availability constraint definition data, refresh said

current availability data with said proposed availability data; or

vi)   in the case that said proposed aggregate availability data is

incompatible with said team availability constraint definition data, to output a

rejection message to at least a second worker interface,

said second worker interface, on receipt of said rejection message, being arranged to

transmit to the data processor a second worker future availability change proposal

signal, said second worker future availability change proposal signal indicating dates /

times at which said second worker is or is not available for allocation to tasks which

compensates for said first worker future availability change proposal.

36.   (New) Apparatus according to claim 35 wherein each worker interface is

provided with a profile store for storing at least one worker profile and, on receipt of a

rejection message, each worker interface is arranged to review any worker profiles

stored in its profile store and, in the event that a worker profile is identified as relevant to

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the rejection message, to transmit to the data processor a future availability change proposal signal from the worker interface.

37.   (New) Apparatus according to Claim 36 wherein a worker profile comprises at least one data element and a rejection message comprises at least one data element, review of a worker profile comprising matching the data element from a rejection message against the data element or elements in a worker profile.

38.   (New) Worker allocation apparatus, for use in the allocation of workers to carry out one or more tasks, the apparatus comprising availability management means for managing availability of a team of workers and worker allocation means, wherein the availability management means comprise:

i)   a signal input for receiving signals from a worker interface, said signals comprising availability data with respect to said worker;

ii)   a constraint definition data store for storing data defining constraints relating to availability of said workers for allocation to tasks;

iii)   a worker availability data store for storing an initial data representation of worker availability for said team and a proposed data representation of worker availability for said team; and

iv)   a data processor arranged, in use, to maintain an initial data representation in the worker availability data store, to receive from said signal input, a first worker future availability change proposal from a first worker interface, said first worker future availability change proposal including dates /

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times at which said first worker is or is not available for allocation to tasks, to

generate a proposed data representation of worker availability, to review the

proposed data representation of worker availability against the constraints, and in

dependence upon the outcome of said review, either to substitute the proposed

data representation of worker availability for the initial data representation or to

output, by means of a signal output, a rejection message to at least a second

worker interface and wherein said second worker interface is responsive to

receipt of said rejection message to generate a second worker availability

change proposal, said second worker future availability change proposal

including dates / times at which said second worker is or is not available for

allocation to tasks, to compensate for said first worker availability change

proposal; and

wherein the worker allocation means are arranged in use to allocate workers of said

team to one or more respective tasks in dependence upon a representation of worker

availability for said team maintained by the worker management means.

39.   (New) Apparatus according to Claim 38 wherein said constraint definition

data store comprises a store storing at least two sets of constraint definition data, each

set having at least one input, said apparatus having means for reviewing constraint data

received at one input against constraint data received at another input, and means for

either outputting a rejection message or for loading the received constraint data, in

dependence on the outcome of the review.

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40. (New) Worker allocation apparatus according to claim 39, wherein the signal input is also for receiving a management signal input from at least one management interface, one or more of said management signals comprising constraint data with respect to at least one worker, and the apparatus further comprises means for using constraint data received from a management interface to enter or change data in the constraint definition data store, and means to categorise data in the constraint definition data store according to source type, the apparatus being further arranged, on review of the content of the constraint definition data store, to resolve any conflict in constraint data relevant to a task acceptance signal according to its source type.

41. (New) Worker allocation apparatus according to claim 38 wherein data in the constraint definition data store is categorised by location in the store.

42. (New) Worker allocation apparatus according to claim 38 wherein the apparatus is further arranged to store at least a third category of data in the constraint definition data store, the source of data in the third category being requirements of an operational support system for use in performing allocated task(s).

43. (New) Worker allocation apparatus according to claim 38 wherein at least one of said worker interfaces is provided with a worker specific data store, and is triggerable by receipt of said rejection message or said notification signal to review its worker specific data store and to transmit worker availability data to the signal input of the worker management means dependent on the outcome of the review, such that

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allocation of workers can be amended according to interaction between a worker interface, the worker management means and the worker allocation means, within limits determined by the constraint definition data.

44.   (New) A method according to claim 27, wherein said constraint definition data define constraints relating to the allocation of tasks to workers.

45.   (New) Apparatus according to claim 35, wherein said constraint definition data define constraints relating to the allocation of tasks to workers.

46.   (New) Worker allocation apparatus according to claim 38, wherein one or more signals received at the signal input comprises a task acceptance signal from a worker interface and wherein the apparatus is arranged in use to respond to receipt of a task acceptance signal by reviewing the content of the constraint definition data store and, depending on the result of the review to output to at least one worker interface a notification signal identifying at least one task for which worker is required, or to allocate worker to a task.

47.   (New) A method of managing availability of resources in a set of resources in support of the allocation of resources in said set of resources to carry out tasks which together fulfil one or more work requirements, each resource in the set of resources being provided with a resource interface, the method comprising:

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storing constraint definition data defining constraints relating to availability of said

resources for allocation to tasks;

storing an initial data representation of resource availability;

operating a data processing means to:

i)   receive, from a first resource interface, a first resource future

availability change proposal concerning future availability of a first resource, said

first worker future availability change proposal including dates / times at which

said first worker is or is not available for allocation to tasks;

ii)   generate a proposed data representation of resource availability,

based on the initial data representation together with said first resource future

availability change proposal;

iii)   determine whether said proposed data representation is compatible

with said constraint definition data;

iv)   in the case that said proposed data representation is compatible

with said constraint definition data, substitute said proposed data representation

for said initial data representation to generate a new initial data representation;

and

in the case that said proposed data representation is not compatible with said constraint

definition data, transmit a rejection signal to at least a second resource interface,

whereby said second resource interface may respond to receipt of said rejection signal

by outputting a second resource future availability change proposal, said second worker

future availability change proposal including dates / times at which said second worker

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is or is not available for allocation to tasks which compensates for the first resource availability change proposal.

48.   (New) A method according to claim 47 wherein said constraint definition data comprises at least two sets of constraint definition data, and the method further comprises:

receiving via a user interface a proposed modification to a first set of constraint definition data;

reviewing the proposed modification against the second set of constraint definition data;

in the case that the proposed modification is compatible with the second set, modifying the first set accordingly; and

in the case that the proposed modification is not compatible with the second set, transmitting a rejection signal to the user interface.

49.   (New) Apparatus for use in managing availability of resources in a set of resources in support of the allocation of resources in said set to carry out tasks which together fulfil one or more work requirements, the apparatus comprising:

an input for receiving communication signals from a plurality of resource interfaces;

a constraint definition data store for storing data defining constraints relating to availability of said resources for allocation to tasks;

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a resource availability data store for storing an initial data representation of

resource availability and a proposed data representation of resource availability; and

data processing means, the data processing means being arranged, in use, to:

i)   maintain an initial data representation in the resource availability

data store;

ii)   receive an input from a first resource interface comprising a first

resource future availability change proposal for said first resource, said first

resource future availability change proposal including dates / times at which said

first resource is or is not available for allocation to tasks to generate a proposed

data representation of resource availability, to review the proposed data

representation of resource availability against the constraints, and

iii)   either to substitute the proposed data representation of resource

availability for the initial data representation or to output a rejection message to at

least a second resource interface, dependent on the outcome of said review;

said second resource interface, on receipt of said rejection message, being arranged to

transmit to the data processing means a second resource future availability change

proposal signal, said second resource future availability change proposal signal

indicating dates / times at which said second resource is or is not available for allocation

to tasks for the second resource which compensates for said first resource availability

change proposal.

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